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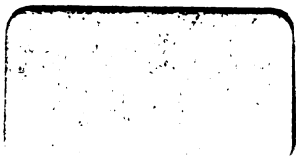
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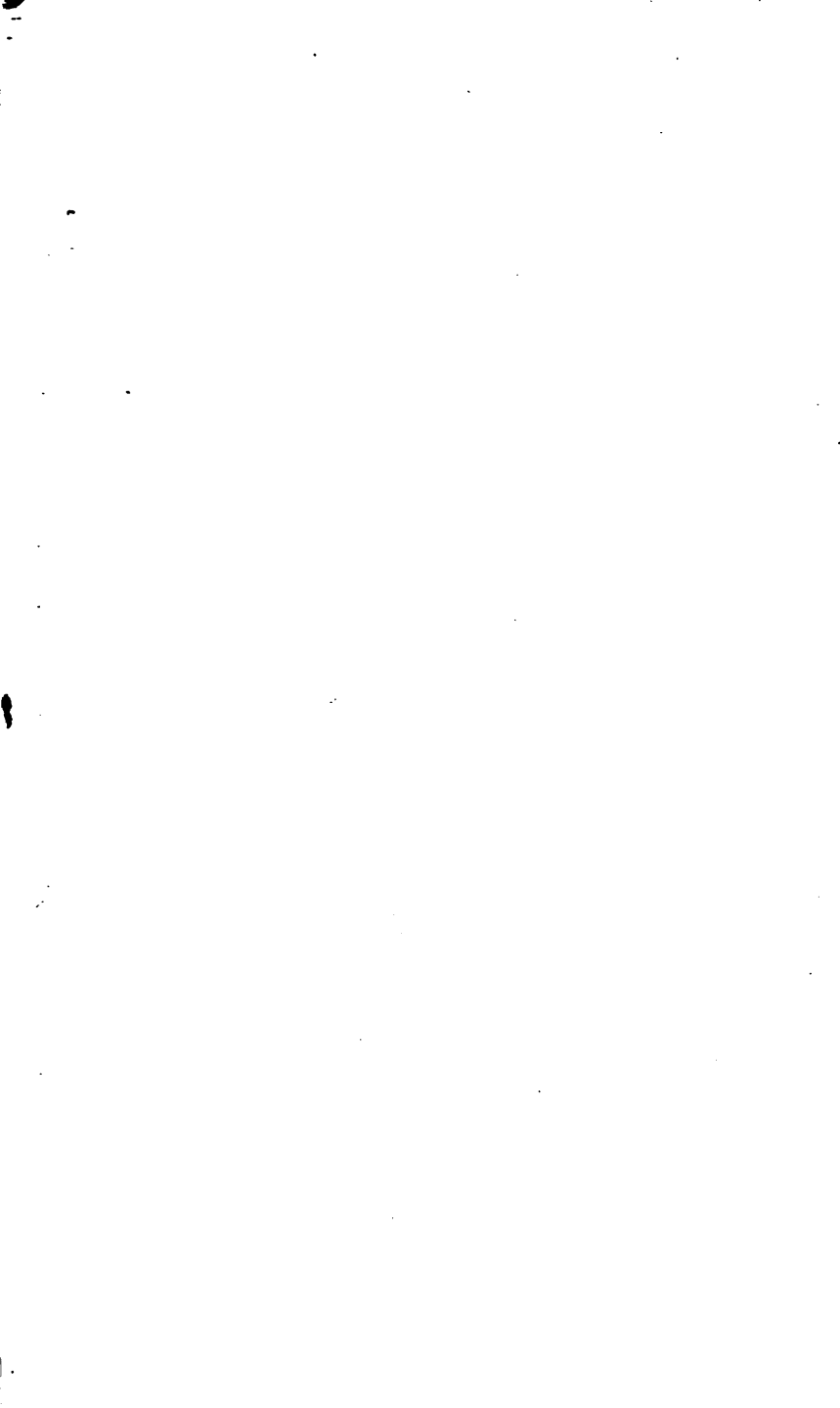
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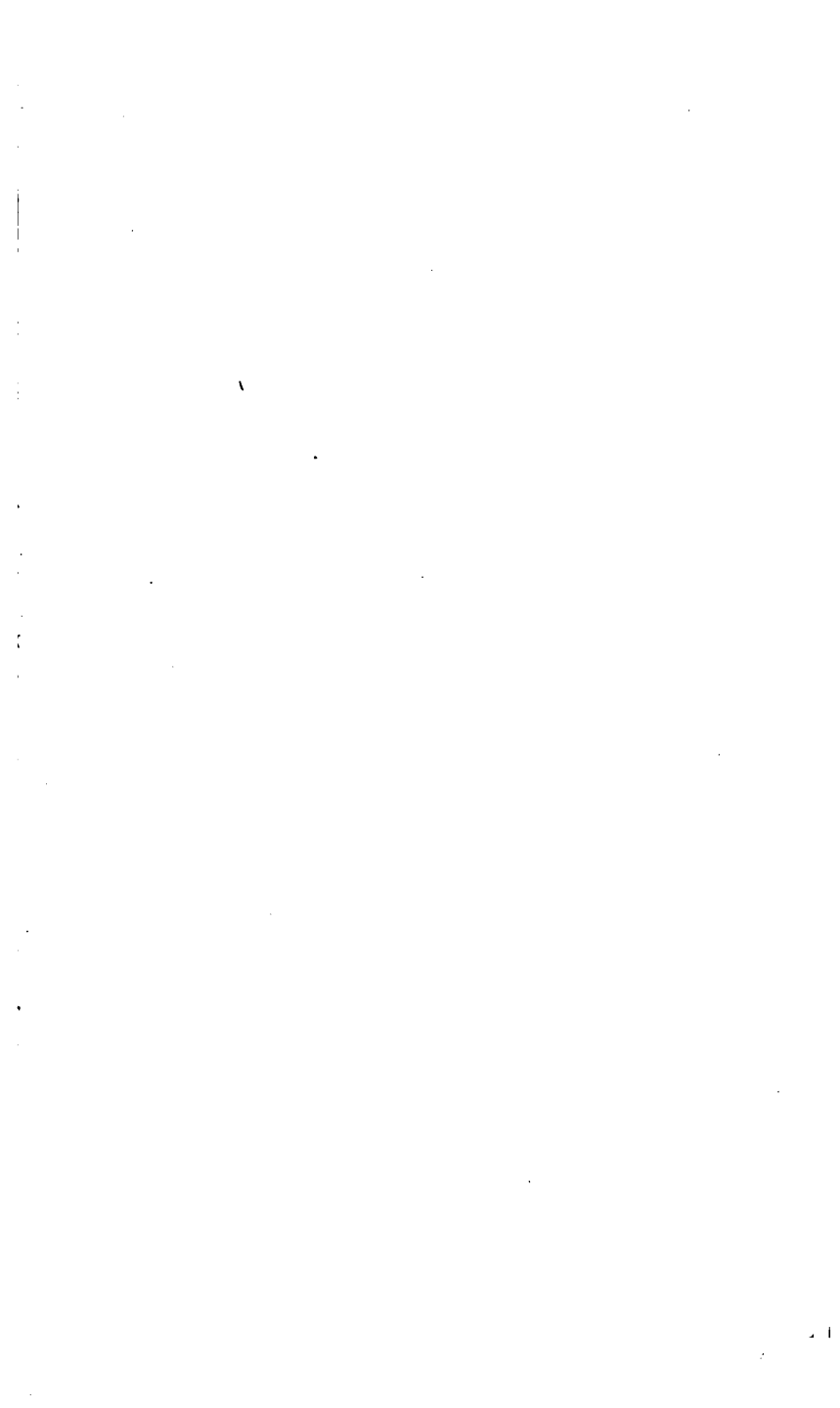
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STEADFASTNESS AND BRIGHTNESS



STEADFASTNESS AND BRIGHTNESS

A SERMON PREACHED IN S. JOHN'S CHURCH
WILKINSONVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

ON SUNDAY, MAY 21, 1905

AT A MEMORIAL EUCHARIST FOR
MRS. JAMES FLETCHER WHITIN

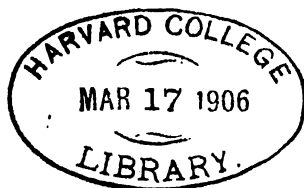
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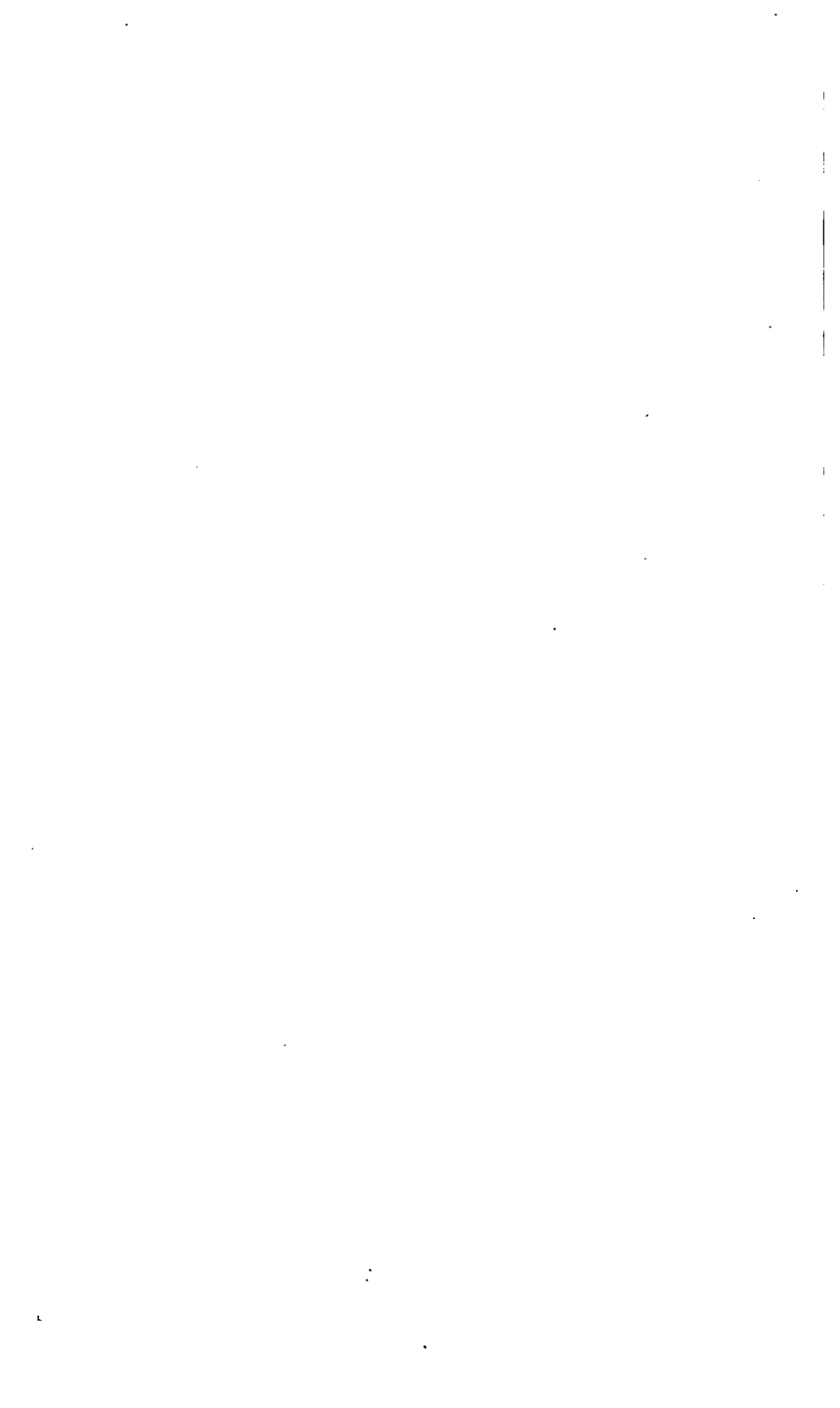
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Dr. S. A. Green

D. B. UPDIKE THE MERRYMOUNT PRESS BOSTON

IN BELOVED MEMORY OF
PATIENCE HOWARD SAUNDERS WHITIN
BORN MAY 21, 1818
ASLEEP IN THE PEACE OF GOD
DECEMBER 13, 1904



STEADFASTNESS AND BRIGHTNESS

ROM. v. 4: *And patience, experience; and experience, hope.*

I STAND here to-day to make, as God may give me grace, some small commemoration of an old friend, who had a blessed old Scripture name given her, and wore it worthily through a very long life. Men and women who have noble names given them do not always make those names their own by carrying out the noble meaning in their lives. I think that this good friend deserved her name, and so I bring you a text which has that suggestive name in its very forefront,—*Patience*. Now there are two Scripture words of the Greek tongue which our old translators rendered into English as *patience*, three hundred years ago, and some of the modern scholars who have been employed in making our Revised Versions

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think that we would better learn to distinguish them. Both words have the idea of bearing things well that come hard, but one looks to bearing fretting things without losing temper over them, and the other looks to bearing painful things, or burdensome things, or discouraging things, without being turned out of one's way, without giving up, in fact, either one's regular work or one's steadfast walk, because of such happenings.

The first kind of patience, the one that refuses to be fretted out of the peace of God, is the opposite of being "short-tempered," and I often wish that we had such a word as "long-tempered" in our English speech. The Greek language had such a word. "Have patience with me," says the servant in one of our Lord's parables,— "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." It is just as if he had said, "Be long-tempered with

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me." "Be long-tempered" would be the most literal rendering of the Greek phrase. But it is the other "patience" that is most dwelt upon by the New Testament writers, and by our Lord Himself,—the patience that stands fast. That patience also may well be described by reference to its opposites. It is the opposite of being, as we say, "slack-twisted." It is the opposite of being "weary in well-doing," of dropping out of the procession, of saying, "It is too hard!" It is called once in our English Bibles "patient continuance." It is called by our American Revision, in most places where it occurs, "steadfastness."

And as this latter "patience" is the more frequently named in the New Testament writings, so is it the greater thing. Doubtless the two kinds of patience are apt to be found together,—the patience of the unfretted temper,

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and the patience of the steadfast walk. Fretting and failing are very apt to go together, getting vexed and giving up; and certainly one that is strong enough not to be fretted by fretting things is not likely to grow weary and drop out in the presence of hard things. But yet the two ideas, the two kinds of patience, ought to be distinguished; and of the two, we ought to bear in mind, the patience of steadfastness, the patience of this text which I have brought you to think of to-day, is verily the greater.

I. And just here, before I proceed to my special subject, the memorial which lies very near my heart, this morning, I want to open out to you a little more fully, with reference to its connections in S. Paul's thought, the text which has seemed to me so fit a foundation for my memorial. S. Paul has been speaking of Christians as rejoicing "in the hope of the glory of God." Then he

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goes on to speak of them as rejoicing even in their own distresses. "For tribulation worketh patience," he says; "and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed." The English Revised Version gives the clauses just a little differently,—“Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, probation; and probation, hope; and hope putteth not to shame.” And the American Revision gives the earlier clauses a little differently still,—“Affliction worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope.”

About that bitter-sweet beginning there is practically no difference. Whether they take “affliction” or “tribulation” as the more appropriately suggestive word, whether they call this great Bible virtue “patience” still, or insist on writing it “steadfastness,” whenever it is the patience that holds

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on and stands firm that is in mind, the meaning is just the same, and quite clear, and quite inevitable also. It is one of the facts of God's world. There must be pains of body in our lives. There must be sorrows of heart. There must be troubles and trials, burdens, worries, without end, or at least enough to make us feel as if they were without end. These things *must* be, I say. It is not merely that God cannot prevent their happening to His children. He does not want to prevent it. For these things have their use and value in the world. They *work patience*, or in other words, they make character.

We call the training of our horses "breaking" them, when really what we call "breaking" is the "making" of them. Surely our Heavenly Father, who has filled the world so richly with parables, means us to see one here. There is no life so sheltered by the tender

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care of human love, or so safe-guarded and fortified by the acquisitions of a great prosperity,—nay, I will rather say, there is no life so abandoned to its fate, so uncared for and forsaken by Almighty God, as to have no part in this breaking which is the making of us. We shall all have the breaking. If it prove to be a making, if it turn to God's end for which He sent it, if, in short, our tribulation that falls into our lives be found to work patience as a fixed result in our character, then we may rejoice and give God thanks for His good sending, even through our tears.

For the next step is surer. Tribulation, affliction, may not work steadfastness in us after all; but if we do attain to the patience which is steadfastness, that steadfastness will hardly fail to work in us something more. Only the translators of S. Paul's Greek seem to have much difficulty in telling us what

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that something is. What does “patient continuance” work? As I have told you, our old King James Version calls it “experience.” The Westminster Revision calls it “probation,” and the American Revision “approvedness.” Certainly we must take one of these latter renderings. “Experience” means what we get by trying things. S. Paul’s word means what we come to by being tried, put to the proof, ourselves. “Steadfastness” —I think that the American Revisers have given us in that word a value that we cannot afford to leave unused,—“Steadfastness worketh the experience of being tried.”

And let no one make the mistake of regarding this as a shallow utterance. It is because we ourselves think shallowly that we do not realize how deep it is. Let us think again! The soul that does not stand firm and hold on knows very little of temptation, and very little of

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trial. Our Lord Jesus Christ—He alone of all the world—knows the full hardness of temptation, because He never in all His earthly life eased the strain of a temptation by even a little giving way! “Stand like an anvil that is beaten upon,” wrote one of the earliest of Christian bishops, while on his way to martyrdom, to a youthful bishop who was himself to win the martyr’s crown years afterward.* “Stand like an anvil”! So stands the patience of steadfastness, shirking no blows, refusing no hard lessons. That habit worketh the invaluable result of a full “probation.”

I like that word “probation,” of the Westminster Revision, better than the “approvedness” of the American Revisers. Doubtless much “probation” of a steadfast soul does lead to much “approvedness” in the judgment of God;

* *S. Ignatius of Antioch to S. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, circa A. D. 110.*

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but when we go on to the next saying, about "hope," I feel that what works hope in a human heart must be something that is felt in that heart humanly, and not some great, searching judgment seen with the eye of God. "And probation, hope." That I can understand. The soul might be very much approved, and not know it. How would that make hope abound? But "probation" does work hope. The experience of having been tried and brought through, over and over again—that fills the child of God with happy assurance. "This God is our God for ever and ever." That is the voice of the soul that has known much proving. "This God is our God for ever and ever: He shall be our Guide unto death." "And hope," says S. Paul,—the kind of hope that God's children learn through their experience of standing steadfast under God's proving,—"hope putteth not to shame."

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To sum up the teaching of this text of ours, S. Paul's idea of the Christian life is this: All lives must have their troubles and trials, but the faithful Christian will through troubles and trials learn the steadfast habit which we have been taught to call "patience;" and through that habit of steadfast continuance will feel much proving; and through that experience of proving will come out into the glad brightness of a joyful hope and trust. Steadfastness and brightness! Faithful firmness under many trials, and more and more happiness, as life goes on, no matter how many, nor how hard, the trials may be! That is S. Paul's vision of the right and ripe development of the training of the child of God.

II. I come here, as I said at the beginning of my sermon, to speak of an old friend. My qualification is that I loved her much. A critic might say of

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me—in all kindness, too—that I have a serious disqualification in that I knew her little. That is quite true. She was my elder by a whole generation, and we rarely met. There may well have been traits of her character, incidents of her career, which another would commemorate worthily, and which I must miss. But whatever I may have failed to apprehend, I have gained a clear and confident vision of two characteristics that came out very strikingly in my old friend's life, and they are just the steadfastness and the brightness of this passage of S. Paul. I want to say something in illustration of each.

1. And, first, there is the habit of the steadfast mind. In Mrs. Whitin's character it had two commanding manifestations,—in her unswerving loyalty to her religious convictions and to her Church, and in her unforgetting fidelity to her friendships. There was some-

thing noteworthy in both.

(a) Devoted loyalty to the Church of which we are members is now an easy thing. The Episcopal Church is a conspicuously great institution in these days, even in the world's eye. It is highly prosperous, strong in numbers and wealth. It has an influence in our national life which necessarily commands respect. But seventy or eighty years ago the case was different. Go back with me to the year 1826, when the Episcopal Church had but five buildings open for service in the whole State of Rhode Island,—Providence and Newport, Bristol, North Kingstown, and North Providence were the five towns,—and religious animosities were still keenly felt, and our dear Church might certainly have been described as “a sect everywhere spoken against.” It was in that year that a little girl between eight and nine years old

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was taken by a friend of her family to S. John's Church, Providence, and saw a vested clergyman and heard a Prayer-Book Service for the first time. I think that it was in that same year that a boy who was then just turned thirteen had the same experience. The boy and the girl knew nothing of one another then, but they came to be very close friends afterwards. The little girl, of Quaker associations mostly, whose heart went out toward the Church at its first word to her, was Patience Saunders, long known to you in this Church as Mrs. James F. Whitin. The Methodist boy, whose heart made the same instant response to the Church's voice, was Henry Waterman, afterwards a Priest of the Church, Rector of S. James's, Woonsocket, in the late '30's, Rector for nearly twenty-seven years of S. Stephen's, Providence, and my own father. Pardon, I pray you, my

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speaking of things so merely personal. It is because of personal connections of this sort that I am called here to-day, and nothing is more accordant with the spirit of my old friend than that when my heart is full of such I should bring them out, and make much of them, even as did she all the years of her life.

But you may think that it is not fixity, but change, that I am here recalling in the early years of my friend's religious experience. A certain connection with the ancient Church was, indeed, to be found among her valued traditions. Her father's mother, Alice Stevens, was an Englishwoman, who came to Newport with her brother, an officer in the British service, and there married Robert Saunders, casting in her lot henceforth with England this side the sea. Mrs. Saunders always kept her loyalty to her Church, making the journey from her

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country home to Providence, when she could, for her Communions in S. John's Church, and she left to her son a strong feeling in favor of our institutions and ways. Yet he was not a member, nor even an attendant, of the Episcopal Church, and, as we have seen, his daughter was introduced to the Church of her English grandmother by a friend who was not at all of her near kindred. Certainly our friend's actual religious atmosphere had been that of "the People called Friends," and it was with marked independence of character that she separated herself from it.

But change is not incompatible with steadfastness. A very steadfast soul may make great changes for great reasons. Rather, it is the steadfast soul that takes the trouble to study out the greater reasons for a new course of action, and then stands by them. That is what the little girl of Quaker training did, when she

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grew up to womanhood and came to have the man who had once been a Methodist boy in S. John's, Providence, to be, as Rector of S. James's, Woonsocket, a much-loved pastor and faithful spiritual guide.

Those were the days of learning steadfastness. In the young churchwoman's twenty-fifth year it began to show. On July 23, 1842, she was married to Mr. Whitin. Not many people in these days could imagine how much it meant then that the young bride claimed her privilege, and stood fast, and had it, of being married in S. Stephen's Church, Providence, by the friend who had baptized her in the Woonsocket days. Marriages in church were far less common then than now. Few indeed were they who could sympathize with the religious motive. The people who set fashions of thought in those days said loftily—so my mother

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has told me, who had to give up the idea of being married in church, though her bridegroom was a man in Holy Orders, and both desired it—that it was “more delicate” for a young woman to be married in the privacy of her home. Strong were the convictions, and strong the character, of the bride who in those days was married before the Altar by a vested Priest.

And one thing more I will say in that connection. Firmness grows easier, doubtless, with practice as the years go by. But firmness of loyalty to her Church and her religious principles could not possibly have been a painless thing for Mrs. Whitin in the first ten years of her married life. I must remind you of what I have said before. Religious animosities were still keen. The Episcopal Church was much despised, much hated. And then from 1845 on, the defection of Dr. Newman and others in

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England confirmed the fears of many that the system of our dear Church was only an open door to Rome, while scandals on our own side of the ocean spread wide the feeling that Episcopalians had no vital personal religion. With all the love that surrounded her, the young wife had come into a family of strict Congregationalists, who could boast that up to now there had been no failure from Puritan Orthodoxy in all their ranks. There had never been among them a Baptist, a Methodist, a Unitarian, or a Quaker. This Episcopalian made the first break in their proud tradition. It was no common steadfastness that, amid such conditions, held her absolutely true to the Catholic Faith and the Apostolic Order as she had learned them.

I pass over all the years of harvest that followed. Devotion was easy then, one might say. But there are souls who

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can contend strenuously for a cause, but lose their zeal in times of peace, lacking the spice of opposition. Mrs. Whitin was not of such. The last words she spoke in this world's life were wholly characteristic of her. "*Thank you!*" she said to her friend, the Parish Priest, who had been reading Prayer-Book Collects by her death-bed. "*Thank you! Good Church Prayers!*" Gentle courtesy, caring finely for fine form in the manifestations of life! Unfailing love and loyalty to the Church of her long membership, and admiration, too, as for a wise nurse of souls! In such things she had been steadfast, and they could not fail her at the end.

(b) I have glanced at the habit of considerate courtesy as underlying those last words of my old friend. That habit of her life stands very closely related to that other great steadfastness which I have named, her steadfastness to-

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ward her friends, remembering them, loving them, taking care for them. I have known a great many old people. It is a general characteristic of their time of life that they like to go back to the far past and tell stories of it. They have a great deal to say about those whom they have known long back. But their interest is apt to be a self-centred interest. They tell much about their early associations, whether with friends or with foes, but always the old man's real subject is—himself. The friend whom I am commemorating here to-day deserves commemoration eminently for this sake,—she was herself remarkable among friends that I have known for her commemorations of others, speaking constantly of old friends, not as a means of talking about herself and setting herself in various interesting lights, but because she kept them alive in her heart, loved them still,

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and lived in a perpetual companionship with them, which no flight of years could wear away.*

Let me speak of something very personal once more, because only so can I illustrate a singularly beautiful habit of a beautiful soul. Some time after my old friend's death there came to me a

** It may be noted here—and Mrs. Whitin would have wished it to be noted—that members of old Rhode Island families are apt to have even a particularly strong feeling for family and historical associations. The Colonies that went to make up that little State consisted mostly of men and women who, in time of religious persecution, had been outlawed from the Colonies of Massachusetts. Hence came much intermarriage, and a habit of devotion to one's district and one's clan, akin to that of Scottish Highlanders. As a lineal descendant of the great founder, Roger Williams, the Apostle of Religious Liberty in New England, and of other leaders in the Rhode Island origins, Mrs. Whitin had her full share of our Rhode Island habit of thought.*

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gift which she had devised for me for a particular day. The chief motive of the gift—I loved it all the more for that—was love of some who have been gone for years out of this visible world, and what touched me especially was that, with loving remembrance of them and me together, she had thought of this gift, and taken care for it, and caused it to be brought across the sea, months before the time for which it was prepared. Such was the habit of that steadfast soul, to whom the dead that she had loved lived always in her heart.

2. And here again one of my subjects brings me very near to another, for it was natural that she who saw her friends among the dead so vividly should see all things vividly, and take an eager interest in the life of this world. Through patience and proving, the Christian soul is brought into an atmosphere of hope, and an atmosphere

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of hope must necessarily carry with it some measure of the brightness of joy. But here, it must be acknowledged, there is a large difference between some steadfast souls and others. A very steadfast soul may be narrow and sour by nature, and never in this world escape wholly from resulting gloom. It was the happiness of our good friend that her steadfastness was not of the Puritan type. She saw the world she lived in largely, and saw it true, and she enjoyed the good things of it with all her heart, without fear of losing her hold, as indeed she did not lose, nor loose, her hold, on things that are better still. I have remarked that she was not of the Puritan type. The prevailing religious type in her ancestry was that of the Society of Friends. The combination of steadfastness with a quiet joy of living has been honorably characteristic of that body. It is true that in their

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early days they separated themselves as stiffly from the world as any Puritan. But they did teach happiness and a present joy where the Puritan taught gloom. Our friend's maternal grandmother was Patience Dyer, who again was sixth in descent from Mary Dyer, chief martyr of the tragedy of the persecution of New England Friends. When that Mary Dyer was standing on the scaffold on Boston Common, where she was hung on the first day of June, two hundred and forty-five years ago, while drums were beaten noisily to prevent her last testimony, so far as possible, from being heard, some one charged her with having said that she had been in Paradise. "Yea," said the martyr, "I have been in Paradise these several days." That spells one of the lessons which the Friends have taught us in our chilly New England life,—that a Christian should be

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a happy soul. The Catholic Church adds to that lesson one salutary word,—
“Using the world ‘as not abusing it’ does not mean declining to use the world at all.”

Helped by her Quaker ancestry to look for brightness as part of her rightful heritage as the child of God, our friend learned also the Catholic Church’s lesson of enjoying the brightness of this present world as God’s gift. And how she did enjoy it! All the innocent pleasures of life had an interest for her. She cared not only for her beautiful home, her friends, her books and papers, but for things that lay farther out, the concert, the opera, the play. I am not ashamed to mention her enjoyment of such things here, and I shall even venture to call it a great *spiritual* fact. For I make bold to say that no one can go on through so long a life, and continue to enjoy this world as freshly

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and as much as she did, who does not keep steadfastly the brightness of enjoying God. Her brightness rested on her steadfastness. She kept her hearty enjoyment of this world because she could say, in the spirit of Mary Dyer, "I have known Paradise these many years." She had the brightness of an ever-present pleasure in pleasant things, because her heart was held securely by the anchor of an eternal hope.

Patience of faith, patience of love, and joy of hope! These made the steadfastness and the brightness of a rarely bright and steadfast life!





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